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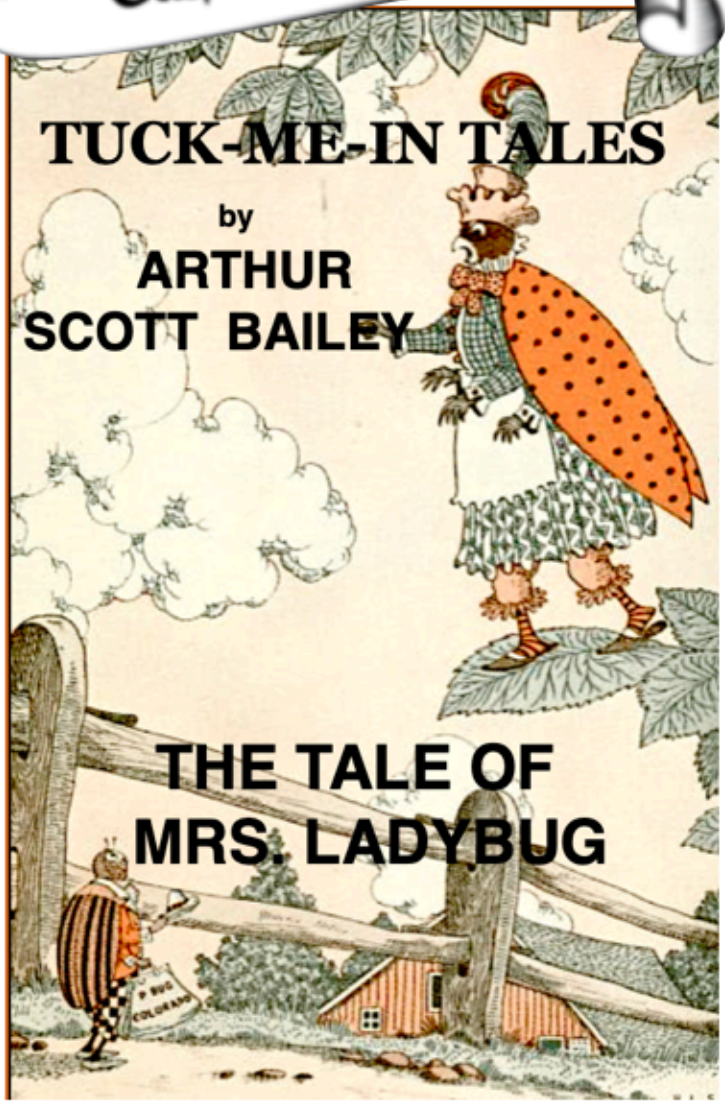
TUCK-ME-IN TALES

by

ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



THE TALE OF MRS. LADYBUG

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by

Arthur Scott Bailey

Harry L, Smith - Illustrator

1921

TUCK-ME-IN TALES

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THE TALE OF MRS. LADYBUG

CONTENTS

I	The Polka Dot Lady
II	Buster's Resolve
III	Hidden Wings
IV	Rusty Wren Helps
V	A Hard Shell
VI	The Traveler
VII	A Handsome Stranger
VIII	Seeking the Truth
IX	That Carpetbag
X	A Bit of News
XI	The New Cousin
XII	A Queer Way to Help
XIII	Jennie Junebug
XIV	Bumps
XV	Enough!
XVI	Playing Dead
XVII	A Brave Gentleman
XVIII	A Mystery
XIX	The Dinner Bell
XX	Fire! Fire!
XXI	Plans for Winter
XXII	Mrs. Ladybug Leaves
XXIII	Back Again
XXIV	Mrs. Green's Mistake

Mrs.Ladybug Scolds Buster Bumblebee

THE TALE OF
MRS. LADYBUG

I
THE POLKA DOT LADY

Little Mrs. Ladybug was a worker. Nobody could deny that. To be sure, she had to stop now and then to talk to her neighbors, because Mrs. Ladybug dearly loved a bit of gossip. At the same time there wasn't anyone in Pleasant Valley that helped Farmer Green more than she did. She tried her hardest to keep the trees in the orchard free from insects.

Some of her less worthy neighbors were known sometimes to say with a sniff, “If Mrs. Ladybug didn't enjoy her work she wouldn't care about helping Farmer Green. If she hadn't such a big appetite she'd stop to chat even more than she does now."

That might seem an odd remark—unless one happened to know how Mrs. Ladybug freed the orchard of the tiny pests that attacked it. The truth of the matter was this: Mrs. Ladybug *ate* the little insects that fed upon the fruit trees. Her constant toil meant that she devoured huge numbers of Farmer Green's enemies.

Goodness knows what Farmer Green would have done had Mrs. Ladybug and all her family lost their taste for that kind of fare. The orchard might have been a sorry sight.

Perhaps it was only to be expected that Mrs. Ladybug should have little patience with folk that seemed lazy. She thought that Freddie Firefly wasted too much of his time dancing in the meadow at night. She considered Buster Bumblebee, the Queen's son, to be a useless idler, dressed in his black velvet and gold. Having heard that Daddy Longlegs was a harvestman, she urged him to go to work for Farmer Green at harvest time. And as for the

beautiful Betsy Butterfly, Mrs. Ladybug found all manner of fault with her.

Nothing made Mrs. Ladybug angrier than to see Betsy Butterfly flitting from flower to flower in the sunshine, followed by her admirers.

"What *can* they see in that gaudy creature?" Mrs. Ladybug often asked her friends.

It will appear, from this, that Mrs. Ladybug was not always as pleasant as she might have been. Moreover, she was

something of a busybody and too fond of prying into the affairs of others. And if she didn't happen to approve of he neighbors, or their ways, Mrs. Ladybug never hesitated to speak her mind.

When she first appeared on Farmer Green's place, wearing her bright red gown with its black spots, everyone supposed that Mrs. Ladybug was dressed in her working clothes.

And indeed she was! Nor did she ever don any other.

"I've no time to fritter away," she declared when somebody asked her what she was going to wear to Betsy Butterfly's party. "If I go to the party I'll just drop in for a few minutes as I am, in my polka dot."

Her neighbors thought that very strange. They even whispered to one another that they didn't believe Mrs. Ladybug had anything else to wear. Nor had she. Nor did she want any. And it wasn't long before everybody understood Mrs. Ladybug's ways. She was so earnest that they couldn't help liking her, no matter if her remarks were a bit tart now and then.

II

BUSTER'S RESOLVE

Not only was Betsy Butterfly a beautiful creature. She was pleasant to everybody. And almost all her neighbors were just as pleasant to her. Mrs. Ladybug was one of the few that were sometimes disagreeable to Betsy. For Mrs. Ladybug did not approve of her. She thought that Betsy Butterfly was frivolous. And she frowned whenever she saw Betsy in her beautiful costume.

"She *never* wears working clothes," Mrs. Ladybug often complained, when talking to her friends. "Now, if Betsy Butterfly would only wear something plain and serviceable, as I do, once in a while, people might have a different opinion of her. She ought to try this

hard-finished red and black polka dot of mine. It's a wonderful piece of goods."

One day Mrs. Ladybug was gossiping in that fashion with Mehitable Moth, a soberly clad person who was always a bit jealous of the gorgeous Betsy. And Mehitable Moth nodded her head to everything that little Mrs. Ladybug said.

"What do you think of Betsy Butterfly's wings?" Miss Moth inquired.

"They're all for show," Mrs. Ladybug declared. "They're so flimsy and delicate that Betsy Butterfly never dares venture out in bad weather. Of what use would I be to Farmer Green if I had wings like hers? If I stayed under cover whenever the sun didn't shine, the orchard would soon be overrun with insects."

Now, it happened that Buster Bumblebee was sipping nectar from a head of clover near by. Of course, he wasn't listening to what Mrs.

Ladybug and Miss Moth were saying. But he couldn't help hearing their remarks. And being a great admirer of Betsy Butterfly, he wasn't at all pleased. He even buzzed near the two gossipers and said to them, "Can't you find something else to talk about?"

"Such rudeness!" Mrs. Ladybug gasped.

"What shocking manners!" cried Miss Mehitable Moth.

They hoped that Buster Bumblebee heard what they said. Anyhow, he flew off in his blundering, clumsy way without speaking to them again.

"Who is this Mrs. Ladybug, to pick flaws in the beautiful Betsy Butterfly?" he asked himself savagely. "Who is she to find fault with Betsy's lovely wings? If Mrs. Ladybug herself had wings, I shouldn't think her chatter so strange. But a person with no wings has no business expressing his views of somebody else's."

Buster Bumblebee was so out of patience with Mrs. Ladybug that he lost his taste for clover heads for the rest of the afternoon. And that was a most unusual thing with him. However, he could think of nothing but Mrs. Ladybug and her unkind speeches. And at last, meeting Betsy Butterfly herself along towards sunset, he stopped to tell how well she was looking and how charming her colors were.

Betsy Butterfly was not vain. She laughed gayly and said, "You're very kind to say those agreeable things."

"I can't help it," he replied heartily.

"Everybody's not like you," Betsy Butterfly told him.

"Then you've been hearing about Mrs. Ladybug!" he cried. "Somebody has been tattling."

"It doesn't matter," Betsy Butterfly assured him. "Perhaps it's good for me to know that everyone doesn't admire me."

Buster Bumblebee didn't agree with her.

"I'll have to speak to Mrs. Ladybug," he declared.

"Oh, don't!" Betsy Butterfly begged him; for she was as gentle as she was beautiful and never wanted people to quarrel on her account.

But Buster Bumblebee had made up his mind and nothing could change it.

III

HIDDEN WINGS

The next day Buster Bumblebee set out for the orchard to find Mrs. Ladybug. He wanted to warn her to stop talking about Betsy Butterfly. But Buster hadn't realized that it was not an easy matter to say anything to Mrs. Ladybug. Mrs. Ladybug always liked to do most of the talking herself. She preferred to let others listen.

He found her hard at work destroying insects on an old apple tree. And when she caught sight of him Mrs. Ladybug paused in her labors.

"Well, young man!" she exclaimed, looking at Buster severely. "Are you idling this lovely day away? You don't seem to be making any honey."

Buster wished that he had spoken first. He certainly had had no intention of discussing such matters as honey making.

"I don't need to make honey," he told Mrs. Ladybug. "The workers in our hive provide honey enough. Maybe you didn't know that I'm of royal blood. I'm the Queen's son. I don't have to work," he declared somewhat hotly.

"Rubbish!" cried Mrs. Ladybug, regarding him with a frown. "Go get yourself some working clothes! Take off your black velvet and gold! And save that suit for best!"

"You don't understand," Buster tried to explain. "Being a Queen's son, I'm expected to wear my court costume every day."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Ladybug retorted. "The sooner you get such silly notions out of your head, the better off you'll be. Everybody ought to work. Too much play is bad for folks."

Buster Bumblebee could feel himself flushing. The neighbors were not expected to address a Queen's son in that fashion.

"That's exactly the way you talk about Betsy Butterfly!" he exploded.

"Huh!" Mrs. Ladybug sniffed. "You are a worthless pair. Betsy Butterfly's wings—"

At this point Buster managed to interrupt her.

"Don't talk about wings, please!" he cried. "Who are you, to talk about wings?—when you haven't any yourself."

Mrs. Ladybug started; and she gave him a queer look. "What's that?" she inquired. "What's that? Say that again!"

"You haven't any wings."

"Ho!" she laughed. "You're mistaken. I *have* wings."

"Then you've left them at home," he insisted.

Mrs. Ladybug smiled a very knowing sort of smile. When he saw it Buster Bumblebee couldn't help feeling uncomfortable. Somehow he knew that he had blundered. But just where he had erred he was unable to decide.

"Watch sharp, young sir!" Mrs. Ladybug bade him. "Watch sharp and perhaps you'll be able to learn something."

Then Buster Bumblebee received the surprise of his life. As he watched, little Mrs. Ladybug opened her shell-like, black-dotted, red back and spread a pair of delicate brown wings.

"See these?" she said to Buster Bumblebee, who gasped at her blankly. "I've really *two* pairs of wings, because my polka dot wing covers are actually wings too—only folks don't usually call them by that name."

Having spread her wings, Mrs. Ladybug decided to take a short flight. And with Buster gazing dully after her she flitted off.

"I'll have to tell my mother, the Queen, about this," he muttered.

IV

RUSTY WREN HELPS

Rusty Wren's wife was getting very impatient. She was at home with her fast-growing family of youngsters, at home in the cherry tree near Farmer Green's chamber window.

"Dear me!" Mrs. Wren exclaimed. "I don't see what's keeping Rusty. It's at least a quarter of an hour since he brought any food to these children."

Mrs. Wren soon grew tired of waiting.

"I'll go and find him!" she said under her breath. And telling her nestlings that she would be back in a few minutes, she hurried off towards the orchard.

"I thought so!" Mrs. Wren muttered soon afterward, as she caught sight of her husband. He was talking with Jolly Robin, in the old apple tree where the Robin family lived. "I thought so!"

"Have you forgotten your duty as a parent?" Mrs. Wren asked her husband in a tart voice, dropping down on a branch right behind him.

Rusty Wren jumped.

"I've been here only a second or two," he faltered. "Mr. Robin and I had a little business together."

"So I see," said Mrs. Wren. "So I see. And now, if your business is finished, allow me to remind you that you have six hungry sons and daughters at home." Then Mrs. Wren twitched herself off her perch and flew back to the cherry tree and her family.

"I declare," Rusty Wren remarked to his friend Jolly Robin, "I must have stayed here, talking with you, longer than I thought. Those

children have enormous appetites. I'll have to work more spryly than ever to get them fed before sunset."

"I know how that is," said Jolly Robin with a chuckle. Somehow he seemed much more cheerful than his companion. "I was actually glad when our last nestlings were big enough to leave home and hustle for themselves. But, of course," he added, "I still keep an eye on them."

Rusty Wren had already begun to hunt for tidbits. Almost immediately he found an ant, which he snatched up and carried away. Back and forth he flew, making dozens of trips between his house and the orchard. Grubs and caterpillars, grasshoppers and spiders—he seized them wherever he could spy them and took them home to his famishing children.

Though he worked his hardest, Mrs. Wren hadn't a smile for him. And when she said anything in his hearing, it was some such remark as this: "You poor, hungry dears! It's a

pity you can't have all you need to eat. I only hope your scanty meals won't stunt your growth."

Naturally such speeches didn't make her husband feel any more at his ease.

"I'll have to bring home something special, to please her," he thought. "I wish I could find some dainty that would put her in better humor."

So he looked all around to see what he could discover that was different from the food he had been gathering. And it wasn't long before he gave a chirp of delight. "Here's a pretty beetle!" he cried. "I know it will make Mrs. Wren smile when I show it to her."

Thereupon Rusty Wren pounced upon Mrs. Ladybug and bore her away, struggling, in his bill.

V

A HARD SHELL

Rusty Wren hurried home, carrying Mrs. Ladybug despite her frantic efforts to escape. She wriggled all her six legs at the same time.

"She'll be pleased with this one," Rusty murmured, as he watched Mrs. Ladybug's struggles. "Mrs. Wren will certainly thank me when I give her this morsel."

And she did.

"How lovely!" Mrs. Wren exclaimed when Rusty gave her his captive.

And he was so glad that he hastened away to try to find another just like that one. But he hadn't gone far before he said, "Ugh! I hope I haven't made a mistake. I don't like the taste

Mrs. Ladybug Directs Mr. Potato Bug

of that beetle." And he dropped down upon the ground and carefully wiped his bill upon the grass.

He couldn't help feeling somewhat worried.

"I don't believe the children will notice anything wrong," he muttered. "So far, they've never refused anything that was offered them. But if Mrs. Wren tried to eat that beetle herself, I fear there'll be trouble."

And there was. Rusty knew it a few minutes later, when little Mr. Chippy's son, Chippy, Jr., came flitting up and peeped in his childish voice, "Please, sir, Mrs. Wren wants you at once."

There was nothing to do except to go home. And Rusty went.

He found Mrs. Wren much upset.

"Are you trying to poison us?" she demanded.

"No, indeed—my love!" Rusty Wren replied meekly.

"Well, you made a terrible mistake, then," she declared.

Meanwhile Rusty Wren was looking all around. Yet he couldn't see the pretty beetle (meaning Mrs. Ladybug) anywhere. "Somebody must have swallowed it, anyhow," he thought.

"You must be more careful," his wife told him severely. "That was a horrid-tasting beetle that you brought home. It's lucky I discovered that it was a queer one. The children—poor dears! —are so hungry that any one of them would have bolted it had I offered it to him."

"Then you ate it yourself," Rusty Wren faltered.

"Oh, no, I didn't," said his wife. "I dropped it upon the ground. And no doubt I'd have thrown it away, anyhow, no matter how it tasted."

"Why?" he asked her. "I thought it was a pretty beetle."

"It was pretty enough—I dare say," Mrs. Wren replied. "But it had a very hard shell. It wouldn't have been safe to feed it to the children. Nor should I have cared to eat it myself."

"I thought it was a pretty beetle," Rusty said again. "It was such a gay color—bright red, you know. It seemed to me it would please the children, and you, too."

Mrs. Wren still seemed to be somewhat out of patience.

"When you gather food for the youngsters, never mind about the color of it!" she exclaimed. "If you want to bring

them playthings, that's another matter. But don't fetch home any more pretty red beetles for them to eat."

"Very well—my love!" said Rusty Wren. And then he slipped away to hunt for food, because the children were still clamoring for more.

Mrs. Wren talked a good deal, afterward, about her terrible experience. Yet she never stopped to think about the pretty beetle—about little Mrs. Ladybug. For Mrs. Ladybug had had a dreadful fright. Luckily she wasn't hurt. But it was a long time before she was her usual busy, able self again. And later, when she told her friends about her adventure, she said that she couldn't understand how Rusty came to make such a mistake.

"I supposed," Mrs. Ladybug declared, "that every bird in Pleasant Valley knew I wasn't good to eat."

VI

THE TRAVELER

Farmer Green's garden was growing fast. The sweet corn waved and rustled whenever a breeze swept it. The beets and carrots sent their pert tops a little higher each day. The cabbages began to puff their heads out as if they felt of some importance in the world. And the potato vines were actually pretty, with their white blossoms amid the green leaves. Farmer Green was very proud of his potatoes. He said, in Mrs. Ladybug's hearing, that they were the best he had ever raised.

"I must fly over to the garden and have a look at those potatoes," Mrs. Ladybug thought. "It's always a pleasure to see flourishing crops."

Before she found time to spare for her visit to the garden a traveler entered the orchard one day. At least, he had every appearance of having come from other parts. For he carried a traveling bag—an old-fashioned carpetbag—and he seemed to have lost his way.

As soon as Mrs. Ladybug saw him she couldn't help thinking what a handsome person he was. He wore a yellow coat. And instead of being spotted with black, as her gown was, it was striped.

"Good morning!" said the stranger.

"Good morning!" said Mrs. Ladybug. "Can I be of any service to you?"

The stranger took off his cap. He was a most polite chap.

"Perhaps you can help me," he replied.

"I'm looking for Farmer Green's vegetable garden. Do you know where it is?"

"Indeed I do!" Mrs. Ladybug cried. "It's at the end of this orchard, just beyond the fence."

"And the potato patch—I suppose I'll have no trouble finding that?" the stranger went on.

"Follow your nose!" said Mrs. Ladybug. "You're headed right for it now."

The stranger thanked her. And he was about to move on. But of course Mrs. Ladybug wanted to talk more than that before he got away.

"The potatoes are fine this season," she remarked.

The stranger looked greatly pleased.

"That's good news," he told her. "Have you seen them yourself?"

"Not yet!" Mrs. Ladybug answered. "But I heard Farmer Green say they were

[Pg 29]

fine. And he ought to know if anybody does."

"He certainly ought," the stranger agreed. Then, thanking Mrs. Ladybug once more, he hurried toward the garden.

"One moment!" she called. There were several questions that she wanted to ask the newcomer. She was wildly curious to know who he was and where he came from and what business had brought him to Pleasant Valley.

But he couldn't have heard her. Anyhow, he was out of sight in no time, leaving Mrs. Ladybug almost bursting with the questions that had sprung to her lips.

"He might have waited a second," she muttered. "But if he has traveled a long way no doubt he's eager to get to his journey's end."

Luckily Mrs. Ladybug had kept her eyes open when talking with the gentleman in the

striped yellow coat. And as he turned to leave her she looked closely at his carpetbag. On one side of it she read, in big letters:

P. BUG

COLORADO

VII

A HANDSOME STRANGER

Little Mrs. Ladybug was too excited to work. Ever since meeting the stranger in the orchard she had been able to think of nothing but him. Perhaps if she hadn't happened to notice his carpetbag, with the words, "P. Bug, Colorado," upon its side, she might not have been so stirred up.

Anyhow, Mrs. Ladybug kept wondering what business had brought the stranger to Pleasant Valley. She wished she could find out what he was going to do in the potato patch. She wanted to ask him why he chose to have black stripes on his yellow coat, instead of spots. How long had he been traveling? When did he expect to leave the farm? There was no end to the questions that Mrs. Ladybug burned to put to him.

Meanwhile she told the news to everybody she saw. For Mrs. Ladybug dearly loved to spread choice morsels of gossip. It pleased her mightily to tell her neighbors something they didn't know.

People listened to her story with great interest. They were eager to learn all about the stranger, whom Mrs. Ladybug declared to be very handsome.

Mrs. Ladybug made her news last as long as possible in the telling. She made her neighbors wait a bit for every fact, so they would enjoy it to the full. And whenever she stopped anyone and told him about the newcomer, Mrs. Ladybug kept the best part until the last. She always ended her remarks by saying, with a most important air, "His name is Mr. P. Bug. And he comes from Colorado."

That never failed to impress her listeners—which was exactly what Mrs. Ladybug wanted.

Since nobody asked her how she knew the traveler's name, and where he came from, Mrs. Ladybug did not trouble herself to explain that she had read both name and place upon his old-fashioned carpetbag.

There was one thing that puzzled her slightly, when she paused to think about it. How did it happen that the elegant stranger carried a most unfashionable bag?

Mrs. Ladybug soon settled that question to her own satisfaction.

"He's like me!" she decided. "Mr. P. Bug is a hard worker and he doesn't care for show. He's a plain person. No doubt he put on that yellow coat to travel in, because it's his best. But he'll wear overalls, perhaps, if he starts to work in the potato patch—as I suspect he will."

At last, however, Mrs. Ladybug met with a rude shock. She was telling her news to Peppery Polly Bumblebee, one of the workers in the hive ruled by Buster Bumblebee's

mother, the well-known Queen. And to Mrs. Ladybug's amazement, when she related the name of the stranger, and the place he came from, Peppery Polly laughed in her face.

"Mr. P. Bug is not from Colorado," said Peppery Polly Bumblebee. "He has never been off this farm."

Well, Mrs. Ladybug was staggered. She gasped. She clung to a leaf to keep from failing.

"I don't believe that!" she cried, as soon as she could speak. "I'll find Mr.

Bug himself and learn the truth from him."

VIII

SEEKING THE TRUTH

Mrs. Ladybug was determined to know the truth about Mr. P. Bug, the newcomer. And as soon as she had fully recovered from the rude blow that Peppery Polly Bumblebee dealt her, she set out for Farmer Green's garden and the potato patch.

For some time Mrs. Ladybug flew back and forth above the potato vines. It was not an easy matter to find so small a person as Mr. Bug in so big a field. But she discovered him at last. And she was somewhat surprised to see him still in his elegant yellow coat, with the black stripes.

For Mrs. Ladybug had expected him to be hard at work, in overalls.

To be sure, Mr. P. Bug did appear to be busy about something or other. He was so busy that he scarcely so much as glanced at Mrs. Ladybug when she spoke to him, mumbling "Good morning!" in answer to her greeting, but not taking the trouble to doff his cap.

"He's at work anyhow," thought Mrs. Ladybug. "He's helping Farmer Green." Then she alighted on the potato vine where Mr. Bug was clinging.

"Don't you remember me?" she asked.

He shook his head. His mouth seemed to be full of something—Mrs. Ladybug wasn't sure what.

"Don't you recall speaking to me one time?" she persisted.

After swallowing, he answered.

"I can't say I do!"

"I'm the person that told you how to get to this potato patch," Mrs. Ladybug explained.

"When you met me in the orchard, on your way from Colorado, you stopped and asked me to direct you to Farmer Green's potato patch."

For a moment or two Mr. Bug seemed puzzled —especially when Mrs. Ladybug mentioned Colorado. But by the time Mrs. Ladybug had finished speaking, he nodded.

"So I did!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten all about that. Though now that you speak of it, I do remember meeting a very talkative dame dressed in a polka dot. Possibly I spoke to you about my settling in the potato patch for the summer?"

"No!" said Mrs. Ladybug. "But I thought I'd find you here. You seemed in a great hurry to reach this place."

"So I was!" said Mr. P. Bug. "And I'm glad I came. This is the finest potato patch in the whole valley—so I have been told."

"You must have seen a good many others on your journey from Colorado," Mrs. Ladybug

ventured. "It's a long way from there to here, I suppose."

"I suppose it is," Mr. P. Bug murmured. He seemed to be a bit impatient, as if he were in haste to return to his work and didn't care to talk any longer.

"I suppose you were weeks on the road," Mrs. Ladybug went on. "Are you going back to Colorado after you've finished helping Farmer Green with the potato crop?"

"Colorado!" he blurted. "I don't know where that place is. I've never been there in all my life."

IX

THAT CARPETBAG

Mr. P. Bug's statement amazed Mrs. Ladybug. He said he had never been in Colorado. More than that, he declared he didn't even know where the place was.

Now, Peppery Polly Bumblebee had told Mrs. Ladybug that Mr. P. Bug was no stranger in Pleasant Valley. But Mrs. Ladybug had not believed what she said. Even hearing Mr. Bug's own words, Mrs. Ladybug couldn't help doubting them.

"Can it be true—" she asked him—"can it be true that you've never been off this farm?"

Mr. Bug quite plainly wished that she would go away and stop bothering him.

"It can be—it *is* true," he replied carelessly.

At last Mrs. Ladybug had to believe what she heard.

"Then you're a fraud!" she cried. '"You're a cheat! For I read on your carpetbag, when we met in the orchard, 'P. Bug. Colorado.'"

"Oh!" said Mr. Bug with a smile. "Oh! So *that's* where you got your odd notion. I wondered how you happened to make such a mistake."

"A perfectly natural mistake, I'm sure!" Mrs. Ladybug exclaimed indignantly.

"Well, I dare say it is," he admitted. "But you see, that's not my carpetbag. At least, I didn't get it new. It belonged to my great-great-great-grandfather. Indeed, I'm not sure he wasn't even still greater than I've said. *He* lived in Colorado once—so I've been told. But I was born and raised on this farm."

"If all this is true," said Mrs. Ladybug, "what were you doing with that carpetbag? And why did you ask me the way to this potato patch?"

"I'm in a hurry to get to work," Mr. Bug remarked. "I'll answer just this once. When we met in the orchard I had been away on a little vacation. And Farmer Green's potato patch—so I learned—had been moved since last year."

"Dear me!" Mrs. Ladybug wailed. "People will laugh at me for having made such a serious mistake."

But Mr. P. Bug didn't say anything about that.

"Good-by!" he grunted. And he crawled under a leaf, out of sight.

For once in her life Mrs. Ladybug wasn't eager to talk to her neighbors. On the contrary, she seemed to avoid them. But Peppery Polly Bumblebee called on her and asked her if she had seen the handsome stranger, Mr. P. Bug.

"Yes!" said Mrs. Ladybug. "I've talked with him. And it's true that he has always lived here. There was a slight mistake about his carpetbag. It belonged to one of his ancestors. And since it bears his ancestor's name and address, naturally I thought they both belonged to this Mr. Bug."

Peppery Polly laughed.

"If you don't believe what I tell you, you can ask him yourself!" Mrs. Ladybug snapped. "He's at work over in the potato patch, helping Farmer Green."

Peppery Polly laughed again, more unpleasantly than ever.

"*Helping* Farmer Green!" she exclaimed. "He's eating the leaves off the vines as fast as he can. I know that gentleman. He's Mr. Potato Bug. And he's one of the greatest pests on the farm."

X

A BIT OF NEWS

Chirpy Cricket was looking for Mrs. Ladybug. He had news for her. Now, it wasn't often that anybody could tell Mrs. Ladybug anything. Usually she was the one that told other people bits of gossip. So Chirpy Cricket was specially eager to find her and make known to her what he had learned.

It was about Mrs. Ladybug's cousin. At least, there was a person living in the vegetable garden who claimed to be a cousin of Mrs. Ladybug's.

Chirpy found Mrs. Ladybug in the orchard. But strange to say, she didn’t seem at all interested in his news.

"I dare say I have a cousin in the garden," she told him. "Ours is a big family. I have more

cousins than I could ever count. They're as plentiful as the leaves on the trees. I can't stop my work to go and see this one. If I called on all my cousins I'd never have time to help Farmer Green."

Chirpy Cricket looked disappointed. He had expected Mrs. Ladybug to show great interest in what he told her. She certainly always thought that others ought to pay strict attention when she related the happenings about the farm. And she always wanted them to act surprised and pleased, too.

"Aren't you going to the garden?" Chirpy Cricket demanded. "Don't you intend to be polite to your cousin?"

"Humph!" said Mrs. Ladybug. “She can't be any busier than I am. Why doesn't she come to the orchard to call on me?"

"She can't do that," he explained. "Your cousin says that it wouldn't be etiquette. She says you've lived on the farm longer than she has."

"Rubbish!" Mrs. Ladybug scolded. "I'm a plain working person. There's too much to do, during the summer, for me to bother with such nonsense."

Chirpy Cricket found her rather discouraging. Still he hadn't given up hope of making Mrs. Ladybug change her mind.

"I fear you're making a mistake," he remarked." You ought to see this cousin. She's different from any of your family that I've ever met before."

"How is she different?" Mrs. Ladybug demanded, pausing in her pursuit of insects on the leaves of the apple tree. At last she began to show some signs of interest.

"I don't know," Chirpy Cricket replied. "I can't say. Maybe it's her clothes that make her look strange."

Mrs. Ladybug then started to ask him questions—which was the best of proof that her curiosity had been aroused.

"What sort of gown was my cousin wearing?" she inquired. "Was it a red polka dot, like mine?"

"I don't remember," he answered.

"What colors did she have on?"

"I didn't notice," said Chirpy Cricket.

Mrs. Ladybug gave him a look of disgust.

"Well, if that isn't just like a man!" she spluttered. "Men never can tell how a body's dressed. If I want to learn anything more about this cousin of mine I suppose I'll have to go and see her with my own eyes."

And that afternoon she went to the vegetable garden.

XI

THE NEW COUSIN

For Mrs. Ladybug, finding her unknown cousin in Farmer Green's vegetable garden was not an easy task. Since Chirpy Cricket hadn't been able to tell Mrs. Ladybug what colors her cousin wore, Mrs. Ladybug didn't know what to expect.

"I wish I knew whether she was dressed in red, black, blue, yellow or some other color," Mrs. Ladybug complained to herself. "But I don't know that. I don't even know if she carries an umbrella."

There was nothing Mrs. Ladybug could do except to ask everyone she met. So she inquired right and left if anybody

happened to be acquainted with her cousin. And at last Betsy Butterfly came to Mrs. Ladybug's help.

"Look among the squash vines!" Betsy Butterfly advised her. "I noticed somebody there that looks a bit like you. Maybe it's your cousin."

That was very kind of Betsy Butterfly. Mrs. Ladybug was no friend of hers. Indeed, Mrs. Ladybug had often found fault with Betsy for being too pleasure-loving. But Betsy Butterfly was not one of the kind that nurses grudges. She was only too glad to do Mrs. Ladybug a favor.

Mrs. Ladybug thanked her—albeit somewhat grumpily. Then, flying to the place where Farmer Green had planted his squashes, she found a person at whom she stared hard for a few moments.

"Do you want to speak to me?" this strange lady inquired. She was a gay appearing

creature, dressed in yellow, with black patches on it.

"I can't tell whether I care to talk to you or not," said Mrs. Ladybug. "It all depends. If you're my cousin, I do. If you aren't, I don't."

The strange lady laughed lightly.

"I wonder—" she replied—"I wonder if you are Mrs. Ladybug."

"I am," said Mrs. Ladybug.

"Then I'm your cousin!" cried the other. "At last I've met you!" And she rushed towards Mrs. Ladybug with every intention of embracing her.

Mrs. Ladybug backed hastily away.

"Not so fast!" she exclaimed. "If you really are my cousin, well and good! But how do I know that you aren't an impostor?"

"A *what*?" the strange lady faltered. She was, quite naturally, somewhat taken aback by Mrs. Ladybug's coolness.

"How do I know that you're not a cheat?" Mrs. Ladybug asked her. "Have you any references?"

"Any *what*?" stammered the would-be cousin.

"Any letters about yourself," Mrs. Lady explained. "For all I know, you may be dissembling."

"I may be *whatting*?" quavered the lady in yellow.

"Dear me!" Mrs. Ladybug muttered to herself. "Must I address this person in words of one syllable?" Then, to her companion she said bluntly, "Tell me why you think you and I are related!"

"That's easy!" cried the yellow one. "I belong to the Ladybug family."

Now, you might think that would have satisfied Mrs. Ladybug. But she wasn't convinced yet.

"My family—" she declared—"my family are all famous workers. If you're one of us, where are your working clothes? Where's your red and black polka dot?"

The cousin tittered. She seemed to be a silly sort of creature.

"I haven't any red and black polka dot," she replied. "These are my working clothes that I'm wearing now."

Mrs. Ladybug shook her head. It was plain that she didn't approve of those clothes—nor of their wearer.

XII

A QUEER WAY TO HELP

Mrs. Ladybug wished that she hadn't come to the vegetable garden to see the person who called herself Mrs. Ladybug's cousin. She wasn't at all the sort of relation that Mrs. Ladybug cared to have.

Although the stranger in yellow was most agreeable, somehow Mrs. Ladybug disliked her exceedingly. And strange to say, Mrs. Ladybug couldn't have told exactly what it was in her cousin that displeased her. It wasn't alone the yellow gown that the new cousin wore. Nor her simpering smile. Nor her trifling manner. It was something else—something that made Mrs. Ladybug feel that she was not to be trusted.

"I must hurry back to the orchard," Mrs. Ladybug announced. "There's work waiting for me there. I really ought not to have left it to come to see you."

"Don't take your work so seriously!" her cousin advised her. "You ought to take more time for amusement. I hope you'll come to see me often."

Mrs. Ladybug's opinion of the stranger sank even lower.

"If some of us weren't earnest about our work the rest of the world would have a sorry time," she declared. "I may as well tell you that I shall not be able to call on you again. I shall be too busy. And there's no use of my urging you to come to see me, because of course you have your work to do too."

"Oh, naturally!" said Mrs. Ladybug's cousin with an odd smile. "Still, I could leave it once in a while to make a cousinly call."

"It won't be necessary," Mrs. Ladybug told her. "If I need you, I'll send for you." And she said to herself grimly, under her breath, "She'll never hear from me."

"If I can help you at any time, don't fail to let me know," the cousin told Mrs. Ladybug. "Doubtless I could be of some service, though I'd always rather work on vines—squash and pumpkin preferred."

Mrs. Ladybug thanked her. "I shouldn't want her helping me," she thought. "I'll warrant she's so careless that she would do more harm than good." And Mrs. Ladybug looked at the vine on which they were standing.

"I see you're helping Farmer Green with his squash vines at present," she remarked aloud.

"Yes!" said her cousin. "I have this one almost finished."

"Good!" said Mrs. Ladybug. And she took a closer look at the vine. It seemed far from

healthy. In fact she noticed that the leaves were tattered and torn.

"What are these great holes in the squash leaves?" she inquired.

Her cousin fidgeted and made no reply. Glancing at her, Mrs. Ladybug thought she was growing a bit red in the face.

Then all at once Mrs. Ladybug guessed the dreadful truth.

"You've been *eating* these leaves!" she cried.

Her cousin tossed her head.

"A person has to eat something," she retorted.

Mrs. Ladybug threw up her hands.

"I *knew* you weren't trustworthy," she muttered. "I *knew* you weren't the sort of relation I'd want anything to do with."

Then Mrs. Ladybug left her.

Later, when Chirpy Cricket met her, he asked her if she had seen her cousin who was spending the summer among the squash vines. And he was astonished when Mrs. Ladybug glared at him and exclaimed:

"Never mention her to me again!"

XIII

JENNIE JUNEBUG

Jennie Junebug was a frolicsome fat person. And she was a great joker. The joke that she loved most was this: she loved to bump into people that were flying through the air—to bump into them and knock them, spinning, upon the ground.

Being much heavier than many of her neighbors, Jennie Junebug suffered little from such collisions. And she never could understand why anybody should find fault with her favorite sport. If a body objected to her rough play Jennie Junebug only laughed heartily.

"I don't mind when I take a tumble,"

she would retort. "So why should you?"

And if the sufferer complained that it wasn't the tumble that hurt, so much as the shock of her hard, bulky self, Jennie would shake with merriment and crash into him again.

Really, it was useless to try to reason with her. The safest way was to avoid her if possible, especially after dark. For then was the time that she preferred for her rowdy tricks.

Mrs. Ladybug couldn't abide her. Not only did she dislike Jennie Junebug's jokes. She disapproved of her treatment of Farmer Green. For Jennie Junebug did everything she could to ruin the trees on the farm. She ate their leaves. And that was one thing that Mrs. Ladybug couldn't forgive in anybody.

"It's a shame—" Mrs. Ladybug often said—"it's a shame, the way Jennie June bug riddles the foliage. Here I work my hardest to save the leaves by ridding them of tiny insects that feed upon them—insects that suck the juices from the leaves and make them wither. And there's Jennie Junebug, trying her best to destroy the

leaves that I save.... It's enough to make an honest person weep."

Perhaps Jennie Junebug wasn't so bad, at heart, as Mrs. Ladybug thought her. Maybe she was merely a gay, careless creature who never stopped to consider that she was injuring Farmer Green when she hurt his trees. At least, that was what some of Mrs. Ladybug's other neighbors sometimes remarked.

But Mrs. Ladybug never could believe that Jennie had a single good trait—unless it was good nature. For she was always ready with a laugh, no matter what anybody said to her.

It was seldom that Mrs. Ladybug hesitated to speak her mind right out to a person if she happened to disapprove of him. But she had always kept out of Jennie Junebug's way. Jennie was many times bigger than little Mrs. Ladybug. Mrs. Ladybug trembled to think what might happen to her if Jennie should

ever hurl her fat body against Mrs. Ladybug with a dull, sickening thud.

"If that ever happens," Mrs. Ladybug thought, "I fear I'll never be able to do another day's work for Farmer Green. It might be the end of me."

Now, in spite of her fears, Mrs. Ladybug had even more than her share of courage. And as time went on, and she saw the awful havoc that Jennie Junebug played with the trees, Mrs. Ladybug reached the point where she couldn't any longer stand by silently and let Jennie Junebug riddle the leaves. "Something will have to be done!" Mrs. Ladybug declared to her friends. "I can't compel Jennie Junebug to stop. She's too big for me to handle.

"I'm going to have a talk with her," said Mrs. Ladybug.

XIV

BUMPS

Some busybody went straight to Jennie Junebug and told her what Mrs. Ladybug had said.

"Mrs. Ladybug is going to have a talk with you," this meddling person told the fat and frolicsome Jennie. "She wants you to stop eating leaves. She says you are doing your best—or your worst—to hurt the trees that she is trying to save. She claims that you are no friend of Farmer Green's. She—"

Jennie Junebug broke in upon her companion with a loud laugh.

"I'd like to have Mrs. Ladybug try to speak to me," she chuckled. "If she does, I'll have fun with her. I'll knock her over. I'll send her spinning."

Jennie's friend seemed somewhat alarmed at that.

"Now, be careful!" she begged the fat lady. "Don't forget that Mrs. Ladybug is a little creature! You'll injure her if you're too rough with her."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Jennie Junebug, and also, "Ha! ha!" She had to stop and hold her sides, while she rocked back and forth. "This is a great joke!" Jennie cried. "Imagine Mrs. Ladybug trying to talk with me! Why, she'll be lucky if she can get her breath after I've flown into her once."

"Dear me!" said the tale-bearer. "I wish I hadn't mentioned this matter to you. Of course, everybody knows that Mrs. Ladybug talks too much. And I thought maybe you'd enjoy meeting her and making her keep still. But I had no idea you would do her any harm."

"Bless you!" cried Jennie Junebug. "I wouldn't harm a hair of her head!" And she roared with laughter, for she had made a joke. You see, Mrs. Ladybug had no hair. She was quite bald.

Well, Mrs. Ladybug found Jennie Junebug that very evening. She knew that Jennie wasn't often seen except after sunset. For Jennie loved to see the lights twinkling through the gloom. And she delighted in surprising people in the dark, by flying *bang!* into them and knocking them down. So Mrs. Ladybug didn't leave her work and set out to seek this dangerous fat lady until twilight came.

"Good evening!" said Mrs. Ladybug as soon as she spied Miss Junebug. “Have you a few minutes to spare? If you have, I'd like to talk with you."

Jennie Junebug grinned broadly.

"I can give you a few seconds of my valuable time," she replied. "I was just going over to the

meadow, for Freddie Firefly will be there soon. He dances in the meadow every night. And I like to see his flickering light—and watch him bounce when I hit him. So you'll have to talk fast, for I'm in a hurry," said Jennie Junebug.

"Good!" thought Mrs. Ladybug. "She's going to listen to me, after all." And then she fixed Miss Junebug with her eye and spoke to her severely.

"Don't you think you ought—" she began.

And then Jennie Junebug bumped into her, sending Mrs. Ladybug sprawling.

"Don't I think I ought to frolic with you?" Jennie cried. "Certainly I do."

Mrs. Ladybug managed to rise off the ground.

"Won't you please—" she started to say.

"Won't I please knock you down? Of course I will!" Jennie Junebug exclaimed. And thereupon she struck Mrs. Ladybug again.

Poor Mrs. Ladybug was much shaken. In her fall she had dropped her umbrella, and her handkerchief too. But she didn't stop to pick them up. She scrambled to her feet and rose into the air again, angrier than she had ever been before in all her life.

"I'll thank you—" she spluttered.

"You'll thank me if I'll do that again, eh?" said Jennie Junebug, interrupting her rudely. "Very well! Here goes!" This time she gave Mrs. Ladybug a terrific blow. She dropped upon the grass, where she clung to a blade and swayed up and down for a few moments, dizzy and trembling. And she was gasping so hard, in order to get her breath, that she couldn't speak.

Watching her, Jennie Junebug shrieked with laughter. Then, seeing Freddie Firefly's light flashing in the meadow, Miss Junebug hurried away.

XV

ENOUGH!

Such impudence!" Mrs. Ladybug gasped, as soon as she could speak. "That terrible Jennie Junebug didn't care whether I ever got my breath or not."

After bowling Mrs. Ladybug over three times, Miss Junebug had flown away, leaving poor little Mrs. Ladybug clinging to a blade of grass and wondering if she would be able to move again.

Mrs. Ladybug had attempted to take Jennie Junebug to task. She had intended to berate Jennie for devouring the leaves of Farmer Green's trees and to order her to stop such damage at once. But Jennie Junebug hadn't allowed her to say much. In her playful way

she had knocked the breath out of Mrs. Ladybug.

"I must try some other plan," thought Mrs. Ladybug. "And I'll have to have help." So she sent Miss Moth over to the meadow, to find Freddie Firefly and ask him if he wouldn't come to the orchard because Mrs. Ladybug wanted to talk with him.

He came. He came at once; for he saw Jennie Junebug looking for him. And he was only too glad to escape her attentions. He found her too rough to suit him.

Mrs. Ladybug quickly explained her difficulty.

"What shall I do?" she asked him.

"I don't know," he answered. "I can't do a thing with Jennie Junebug. She knocks me down whenever I meet her. She annoys me."

"It's not so much myself I'm thinking of," said Mrs. Ladybug. "It's Farmer Green's fruit trees

that I'm disturbed about. Jennie Junebug eats the leaves. I must put an end to that."

"I have it!" Freddie Firefly exclaimed suddenly. "I'll ask her why she doesn't bump into Solomon Owl!"

Mrs. Ladybug didn't seem to care for his suggestion. "What good would that do?" she inquired.

"Ah!" he said. "Solomon Owl wouldn't let her browbeat him. He'd soon cure her of her rude pranks."

"Then please speak to her, and to Solomon Owl at once—that is, if you dare to," said Mrs. Ladybug.

"I'm not afraid of him," Freddie Firefly boasted. "He won't touch me. He's a-scared of my light." And then Freddie Firefly flitted away.

He found Solomon Owl easily enough. He had heard Solomon's *Wha-wha, whoo-ah*!

booming from the edge of the woods. And he soon persuaded Solomon to fly down into the meadow.

Solomon Owl sailed above the waving grass, while Freddie Firefly spoke to Jennie Junebug.

She liked his scheme. She thought it would be a great joke to bump into solemn Solomon Owl. And for once she forgot to fling herself against Freddie Firefly.

Only a little while later she struck Solomon Owl with an awful thud. To her huge surprise she fell headlong, while he merely paused in his low flight.

"Who struck me?" he bawled.

"Jennie Junebug!" said Freddie Firefly.

"Where is she now?" Solomon hooted. "If I find her I'll fix her."

Jennie Junebug heard everything he said. She was lying hidden in the grass near-by. And she wouldn't have come out for anything.

"I'll keep an eye out for her," Solomon Owl announced. "I come to the meadow often, a-mousing."

Jennie Junebug kept still as a mouse, herself, until Solomon had gone back to the woods. Then she stole forth from her hiding place, showing a battered face to her friends.

"Good-by, everybody!" she called. "I'm going to move. I'm going 'way down to the end of the valley to live.... I'm off already," she added, as she spread her wings.

Nobody ever saw Jennie Junebug on Farmer Green's place again.

And Mrs. Ladybug was more than satisfied.

XVI

PLAYING DEAD

Farmer Green's apple trees looked green and flourishing. Thanks to Mrs. Ladybug—and some of her relations—there was scarcely an insect left on the leaves. And since there was no more work to be done in the orchard just then, and nothing for her to eat, Mrs. Ladybug settled among the raspberry bushes near the duck pond. She said that they needed her attention.

One day she paused in her labors, feeling that she had earned a few minutes' rest. And she dropped out of the bushes and strayed close to the water's edge.

A light breeze ruffled the surface of the duck pond into tiny waves.

"What a terrible, rough sea there is to-day!" Mrs. Ladybug murmured as she gazed upon the troubled water. "Perhaps, if I cling to a tall grass stalk, I can get a better view of it."

She soon found a stalk that grew high above all the rest. Crawling to the very top of it Mrs. Ladybug was able to look far out over the face of the pond.

"Goodness!" she said to herself. "I'm glad I'm not out there in a ship."

A few moments later she happened to glance down near the shore. And there, to her horror, she beheld a frog.

He was not a big frog. On the contrary, he was the tiniest frog that Mrs. Ladybug had ever seen. He was sitting on a lily pad, singing with a small, shrill voice, which sounded exactly as if you were tapping two marbles together.

Now, Mrs. Ladybug had all her life stood in great fear of frogs. She didn't dare move, as

she gazed at this one with eyes that popped almost out of her head.

He was a brownish person, with a yellow throat which he puffed out like a bag as he sang. And his skin was so rough that Mrs. Ladybug shuddered as she looked at it. Her own was very, very smooth.

All at once the frog looked up and spied Mrs. Ladybug staring at him.

She would have shrieked—had she been able to.

Then Mrs. Ladybug did the thing that she always did whenever she had a great fright. She played dead. She pulled her feet under her body, out of sight, and stuck, motionless, to the grass stalk.

Nothing happened. And she was about to take another sly look at the frog when something moved the stalk of grass. It was only the wind. But Mrs. Ladybug didn't know that. She was sure that the frog had touched it.

Then Mrs. Ladybug played her next trick. She let go of the stalk and dropped to the ground, where she lay upon her side as if she would never move again.

Once more she kept quite still. And since nobody disturbed her, after a time she opened her eyes.

She found herself looking straight into those of the tiny frog, who still sat upon his lily pad in the duck pond.

Mrs. Ladybug shut her eyes instantly. She only hoped that the frog hadn't noticed her action.

XVII

A BRAVE GENTLEMAN

Mrs. Ladybug didn't know that the frog she saw was a very timid fellow. His name was Mr. Cricket Frog. He liked to sit on a lily pad and sing. And his singing sounded a good deal like the music that Chirpy Cricket made. In fact, that was the reason for his odd name.

Mr. Cricket Frog had a trick not unlike the one that Mrs. Ladybug herself played upon him. Whenever a fish, or any other enemy, came near him, if he hadn't time to hide in the mud at the bottom of the pond Mr. Cricket Frog played dead. He would float in the water as if lifeless, until his

enemy had gone off about his business.

He was so timid—this Mr. Cricket Frog—that when he saw a stranger he would sometimes play dead. And that was exactly what happened when he caught sight of Mrs. Ladybug as she clung to the grass stalk near the edge of the duck pond and stared at him.

Of course Mrs. Ladybug didn't know all this. When she shut her eyes, and pulled her feet under her body, she wasn't aware that Mr. Cricket Frog was just as alarmed as she was. Having closed her eyes, she couldn't see him jump into the water and float. She couldn't see him climb out upon the lily pad again and gaze at her. Now, the moment Mrs. Ladybug looked at the frog the second time he took fright anew. Once more he sprang from his seat. Once more he floated like a chip upon the surface of the pond. Once more he crawled back to his seat, after he had made up his mind that the danger had passed.

So they played dead for a long time—both Mrs. Ladybug and Mr. Cricket Frog. And if he hadn't at last made up his mind that she was

afraid of him, they might still be trying to fool each other.

"Pardon me, madam!" Mr. Cricket Frog called to Mrs. Ladybug. "I see you're a bit timid. I assure you I shall not harm you."

At that Mrs. Ladybug opened her eyes and looked at him. Slowly she thrust her feet out from under her body. And then she tried her wings. They were as good as ever. Her fall had not injured them. "You gave me a terrible fright," Mrs. Ladybug told him. Mr. Cricket Frog was very bold now. "Why were you afraid of me?" he asked her. "Do I look fierce?" he inquired with a hopeful smile, as if he hoped that he did, but scarcely dared think so.

"I'm afraid of all frogs," Mrs. Ladybug explained. "Now, there's Ferdinand Frog—
“ "A rascal!" Mr. Cricket Frog cried. "But, madam, I'm not in the least like him. I wouldn't hurt you. In fact, I'd protect you.” His words pleased Mrs. Ladybug. She said

that thereafter she should always feel safe, with him in the neighborhood.

Mr. Cricket Frog bowed gallantly, with his hand on his heart.

And Mrs. Ladybug went away without guessing that he had himself played dead because he had been in terror of her.

"What a brave gentleman he is!" Mrs. Ladybug murmured.

XVIII

A MYSTERY

There was one thing that Mrs. Ladybug dreaded more than any other. That was —fire. The slightest whiff of smoke sent her into a flutter of alarm. The sight of a blaze made her almost frantic.

Perhaps Mrs. Ladybug's neighbors—more than she—were to be blamed for her fear. Some of them had an unkind way of frightening her. When they found her a bit too prying with her countless questions about this, that, and the other matter that did not concern her, they said to her:

"Aren't you worried, Mrs. Ladybug?

What if your house were on fire? Wouldn't your children burn?"

Such questions never failed to send Mrs. Ladybug hurrying away.

After a while people began to wonder where Mrs. Ladybug went when she dashed away like that. Nobody seemed to know where she lived. They supposed that she must fly to her home, wherever it was.

To everybody's surprise, Mrs. Ladybug appeared to want to keep the site of her house a secret from all her friends. When they asked her, point-blank, where her house was, she always pretended not to hear the question and left them. Or she would begin to ask questions of her own choosing, without answering theirs.

"Humph!" said some people. "Mrs. Ladybug likes to pry into our affairs. She wants to know all about our business.

And when she learns anything about anybody else she can't rest until she has told it to the whole neighborhood."

The more Mrs. Ladybug's friends thought about her house, the harder they tried to discover its whereabouts. Sometimes they even mentioned *fire* to her and then tried to follow her when she hurried off. But she always managed to give them the slip before she had gone far.

Now and then somebody or other thought he had found Mrs. Ladybug's house. But in the end somebody else was sure to prove that he was mistaken.

Once Freddie Firefly announced with great pride that at last he knew where Mrs. Ladybug was rearing her family.

"Her house," he explained, "is in a hole in the ground, in the meadow."

And that night he led Miss Mehitable Moth to the spot, lighting the way with his flickering gleams.

She soon pointed out his mistake. He had led her to the doorway of the Bumblebee family,

who were all sound asleep inside their crowded house.

After that Freddie Firefly had to listen to a good many titters from his friends.

"The idea!" they would say. "Mrs. Ladybug must have a much bigger house than the Bumblebee family's. She couldn't squeeze her children into such small quarters as theirs. Why, she has more children than she can count."

XIX

THE DINNER BELL

There was great excitement in Farmer Green's orchard. The neighbors came a-flying and a-running and a-crawling from all directions. And little Mrs. Ladybug was the cause of the hurly-burly. She had appeared with a strange, flaring object hanging by a cord from her waist—if she could be said to have a waist. The queer, dangling thing had a handle at its upper end. And when Mrs. Ladybug moved a jingling, jangling sound might have been heard.

In no time at all a crowd had gathered around her. And some of the more curious and ill-bred pointed at whatever it was that puzzled them.

"What's that?" they asked Mrs. Ladybug.

Strange to say, she seemed pleased with the stir that she had made.

"It's a dinner bell," she explained.

They gazed at it in wonder, until at last somebody spoke up and demanded, "What's it for?"

"To give the alarm with!" she replied.

"What alarm?" chimed a chorus of voices, high and low.

Mrs. Ladybug smiled an odd sort of smile as she answered, "The fire alarm, of course! Everybody's always talking *fire* to me. It makes me frightfully uneasy. There's so little one can do alone in case of fire. But now—" she added—"now when anyone says 'Fire!' I'm going to ring this bell with all my might."

Well, people didn't know what to say—then. Later, however, they gathered about in groups and talked a good deal about Mrs. Ladybug and her dinner bell.

Miss Moth said that she feared Mrs. Ladybug would disturb her rest if she rang the bell in the daytime, when Miss Moth was accustomed to sleep. Buster Bumblebee hoped Mrs. Ladybug wouldn't ring it at night, because he had a short enough night's sleep as it was, with the family trumpeter waking everybody in the house about dawn. And Freddie Firefly exclaimed that it would be very annoying to him if Mrs. Ladybug gave the alarm of fire whenever she saw his flickering gleams on pleasant evenings in the meadow.

If others were troubled, Mrs. Ladybug herself was much pleased by her dinner bell. She liked to hear it tinkle as she

worked. She said it was a cheerful sound and so long as she wore it she never needed to worry about being lost. It was as good as a cowbell for letting the world know one's whereabouts.

There was only one thing that annoyed her. Since she hung the bell from her waist nobody

had mentioned *fire* to her. Nobody had said a word about her children's burning. It seemed as if none of her neighbors wanted her to sound a fire alarm. And if there was anything that would have given her joy, it would have been to seize the handle of her bell and ring it madly.

There were even some people that complained of the tinkle it made among the apple trees.

Peppery Polly Bumblebee laughed at them.

"You've brought this trouble upon yourselves," she told them. "How can you expect Mrs. Ladybug to keep the tongue of the bell still? She can't even keep her own tongue from wagging!"

No doubt Peppery Polly knew what she was talking about. She had a very sharp tongue, herself.

XX

FIRE! FIRE!

The whole countryside was dry. It hadn't rained for weeks. The grass was turning brown. The water in the river was low. And Broad Brook was no more than a narrow trickle. Every morning the sun rose streaming hot, to beat down upon Pleasant Valley all day long until it sank—a round, red ball—behind Blue Mountain each night.

At last, one afternoon, Farmer Green and the hired man started for the woods on a run. They had seen a wisp of smoke curling up from the tree tops. And they knew that the woods were on fire.

There was a high wind that day. And if they hadn't worked lively there's no telling how far

the fire would have spread. As it was, glowing bits came sailing down from the hill and settled in the valley. But luckily they did no damage. At least, no other fire had started anywhere when the men came home from the woods and said that all was safe again.

Some of the small folk that lived in the fields knew what was going on. But Mrs. Ladybug never guessed that there had been a fire. She was so busy, working among the apple trees, that she hadn't noticed any unusual stir. And no one took the trouble to tell her about it.

Everyone had put thoughts of fire out of his mind when along toward evening a loud clanging rang out upon the air.

"What's that?" people asked one another.

And all at once somebody shouted, "It's Mrs. Ladybug's dinner bell!"

Far and wide through orchard, garden and meadow the neighbors took up the cry. "Fire!

Fire! Mrs. Ladybug's ringing the alarm! Her house is on fire!"

Back and forth they hurried, trying to find Mrs. Ladybug.

"At last—" they told one another—"at last we're going to find out where her house is."

And they did. At least, they soon discovered Mrs. Ladybug standing beside a blazing dwelling near the pasture fence. With all her hands (and she had several!) she was ringing her bell furiously.

"We'll help you!" her friends all cried. "Don't worry, Mrs. Ladybug! We'll have the fire out soon. Be calm!"

But there was nothing they could do. The fire raged so fiercely that they couldn't get near enough to it to fight it. And before long it had burned itself out. There was nothing left of the house but ashes.

"What a pity!" said Mrs. Ladybug's neighbors. "It was a fine, big house."

And then some one cried, "What about the children? Where are they?"

Nobody knew. If Mrs. Ladybug did, she was too overcome to speak.

People looked very solemn. They hoped her children hadn't burned.

And then—then Mr. Meadow Mouse came running up all out of breath.

"Sakes alive!" he screamed. "My house is ruined. I wouldn't have had this happen for anything. But it doesn't matter, for I can easily build another."

Mrs. Ladybug's neighbors crowded about her, all asking the same question.

"Wasn't this your house?"

"No!" she admitted. "No, it wasn't." And then she made an astonishing confession. "I've

never owned a house," she said. "I've never had one in all my life. I *can't* have a house. I couldn't get one that was big enough.

"I have so many children that I don't know what to do," said little Mrs. Ladybug.

XXI

PLANS FOR WINTER

It was almost fall. The nights—and some of the days—were chilly. Those that had spent the whole summer out of doors began to think about where they should pass the winter. Yet everybody was amazed by the news that Mrs. Ladybug spread broadcast. She said that she expected, soon, to go into winter quarters.

"Humph!" cried Daddy Longlegs' wife when she heard what Mrs. Ladybug was saying. "She never had any quarters, so far as anyone knows. Mrs. Ladybug hasn't been able to tear herself away from the orchard long enough to live anywhere except in the apple trees."

It was plain that Daddy Longlegs' wife didn't believe what Mrs. Ladybug was telling her neighbors. And there were many more folk that agreed with her.

Little Mrs. Ladybug smiled a knowing smile when she heard what her friends thought.

"They'll see! They'll see!" she said. "I'm going to spend the winter in the biggest and finest house on this farm."

That was all she would tell. She wouldn't breathe another word about her plans. And naturally, every one became very curious. There wasn't a soul that wasn't agog to know what Mrs. Ladybug intended to do.

The neighbors asked her, begged her, teased her—some even threatened her. But she declined to answer. She said

that if she told where she expected to pass the cold months everybody would want to go to the same place and maybe there wouldn't be any room left for her.

Perhaps some of her friends *had* intended to follow her into her winter quarters. Anyhow, many of them looked guilty when she made

that remark. And a few of them looked angry, and declared that Mrs. Ladybug was selfish.

"If the house is as big as she claims it is, it ought to hold a few extra guests without being crowded," they grumbled.

"Guests—" said Mrs. Ladybug—"guests should always wait for an invitation."

"Have you had one?" Buster Bumblebee asked her.

Mrs. Ladybug did not answer his question. Most people thought Buster Bumblebee a stupid fellow. Many people paid

little heed to him. Yet strange to say, he often hit the nail on the head, so to speak. And this time he made Mrs. Ladybug somewhat uncomfortable. She had had no invitation to spend the winter in the fine, big house. But she didn't care to have her neighbors know that.

"There's just one thing to do," Buster Bumblebee decided. "I'll ask the Carpenter Bee if he's building a house for her."

So he went to the big poplar by the brook, where the Carpenter Bee lived. And that mild person himself—sawdust-covered as usual—answered Buster's knock at his door.

"Are you building a house for Mrs. Ladybug?" Buster Bumblebee inquired.

"No!" said the Carpenter. "We couldn't agree. She wanted me to work twelve hours a day. And I wanted to work twenty-four. I told her I must have *some* time to rest. But she couldn't see things as I did."

Buster Bumblebee was puzzled.

"I don't understand," he said.

The Carpenter kindly made matters clear to him.

"I rest only when I'm working," he explained.

XXII

MRS. LADYBUG LEAVES

The Carpenter Bee, who lived in the big poplar by the brook, wasn't building a house for Mrs. Ladybug. That skillful woodworker hadn't been able to agree with her—so he told Buster Bumblebee. Furthermore, he knew nothing of Mrs. Ladybug's present plans as to where she was going to spend the winter.

Nor did anybody else. It was all a great mystery. And Mrs. Ladybug seemed to enjoy it far more than her neighbors did. She was the only person that could have solved it for them. And she wouldn't.

At the same time she took delight in talking about her winter quarters, as she called the place where she intended to live during cold weather.

"It will be cozy and warm there," she often remarked to her callers, of whom she had huge numbers. For there was scarcely a person in the orchard or the garden that didn't burn with curiosity to know more about the fine, big house into which Mrs. Ladybug expected to move.

"My winter quarters will be wind-proof," Mrs. Ladybug told them. And that speech set them all to guessing again.

Almost everybody said then that she was going to live underground.

"I shall not feel a drop of rain—not even during the January thaw," Mrs. Ladybug went on.

And then everybody had to begin guessing all over again; for rain drops were sure to trickle into an underground house during a warm spell.

"You're going to live in a pumpkin!" cried Buster Bumblebee.

And all the neighbors—even Mrs. Ladybug—laughed when they heard that.

Buster knew of an old tune called "The Bumblebee in the Pumpkin," and he cried with some heat that he could think of no reason why there shouldn't be "A Ladybug in a Pumpkin."

"I told you my house was big—the biggest one on the farm," Mrs. Ladybug reminded him.

"Ah!" Chirpy Cricket exclaimed. "Now I know! You're going to live in the haystack. A haystack is cozy and warm; it's wind-proof; it sheds water; and there's nothing bigger anywhere."

It really seemed as if Chirpy Cricket had solved the great mystery.

"He's guessed the riddle!" people said. "You might as well admit now, Mrs. Ladybug, that you're going to spend the winter in Farmer Green's haystack."

But Mrs. Ladybug dashed their hopes.

"You're wrong," she told her friends. "And if to-night's as nippy as last night was, perhaps you'll find out to-morrow where I'm going. For I don't care to freeze my toes here in the orchard."

That night it was colder than ever. And the next day Mrs. Ladybug went all around the orchard and the garden bidding people good-by.

Still she wouldn't tell where she was going. And if Daddy Longlegs hadn't happened to stroll around the cherry tree outside Farmer Green's chamber window that afternoon, nobody would have known where Mrs. Ladybug went. But Daddy Longlegs saw her. And he hastened to spread the news.

"Mrs. Ladybug has gone to spend the winter in the farmhouse!"

XXIII

BACK AGAIN

Somehow Mrs. Ladybug's friends missed her. The orchard seemed quite a different place after she vanished inside the farmhouse to stay there all winter long. In spite of her sharp tongue and her prying ways people discovered—now that she was gone—that they had liked Mrs. Ladybug more than they knew.

While she was with them in the orchard they had often wished she wouldn't ask so many questions. But now the days seemed very long without Mrs. Ladybug to inquire *how* and *why* and *when* and *where*.

And then—then a rumor flashed from lip to lip all the way across the garden and the orchard and the meadow: "Mrs. Ladybug is back again! She didn't stay in the farmhouse a week."

And sure enough! the rumor proved to be true. Mrs. Ladybug, looking rather foolish, appeared in her old haunts among the apple trees. She acted as if something had occurred to upset her. And though she seemed glad to be greeted by all her old companions, she didn't want them to ask her a single question as to why she hadn't spent the whole winter, instead of only a few days of early fall, in Farmer Green's house.

If she thought her neighbors weren't going to question her she was sadly mistaken.

Only a little while before they had asked her a thousand and one questions about *where* she was going to live during the winter. And now they were all just as curious to know why she had returned. But this time they asked her a thousand and two questions.

You couldn't say that her answers weren't satisfying, because she didn't make any answers at all.

Of course, things couldn't go on like that forever. People *had* to know what had changed Mrs. Ladybug's plans. And in order to persuade the stubborn lady to explain matters, a few of her friends hinted that they expected they would have to go to Farmer Green himself and learn the truth.

"You may ask him if you wish," Mrs. Ladybug told them. "But it won't do you any good. He can't tell you what happened because he doesn't know himself."

"Maybe the farmhouse was cold," Chirpy Cricket suggested.

Mrs. Ladybug made no comment on that remark.

"Perhaps the roof leaked," said Daddy Longlegs.

Still no sign from Mrs. Ladybug.

"She found that the farmhouse wasn't wind-proof," said Daddy Longlegs' wife.

And Mrs. Ladybug didn't deny it; nor did she say that that was so.

Then Buster Bumblebee made one of his blundering speeches.

"It was a short winter, anyhow," he said.

Mrs. Ladybug's neighbors couldn't help tittering. And somehow their amusement stung her into telling the truth about the whole affair, right then and there.

"Mrs. Green and I didn't get on well together," she confessed.

XXIV

MRS. GREEN'S MISTAKE

Mrs. Ladybug spoke at last. Her listeners crowded close about her, jostling one another in their eagerness to hear every word she said. For Mrs. Ladybug was recounting her adventures at the farmhouse.

"I flew in through an open window," Mrs. Ladybug began. And she heaved a deep sigh, as if the telling of the tale was costing her much pain.

"I said nothing to anybody," she explained, "because I didn't wish to trouble the family. I knew I could find my way about the house after a little. And it wasn't long before I had discovered the stairway.

"I didn't walk on the stairs for fear there might be mud on my feet," said Mrs. Ladybug. "I didn't walk, but flew up to the second floor and went into the first chamber I saw. There

was a fine, big closet off that room. The door leading into it was ajar; so I had no trouble slipping inside it. And there, high up on a broad shelf, I picked out the very spot where I could have spent the winter with every comfort in the world."

At this point Mrs. Ladybug was overcome by her feelings for a few moments. But the company waited politely until she could go on with her story.

She soon continued.

"All went well—" said Mrs. Ladybug—"all went well until one day—this morning, to be exact—Mrs. Green opened the closet door and began to brush and sweep and wipe and dust. I heard her say that she was doing her fall cleaning. And of course that pleased me; for I was glad to learn that she was a neat housekeeper.

"And then—" here Mrs. Ladybug's voice broke slightly—"and then, the first thing I knew she spied me and cried 'Ah, ha! A Carpet Bug!'

"The next instant she whisked me off the shelf with a brush. Of course I played dead the moment she touched me. And I fell into the dustpan and never so much as wriggled a toe.

"Soon afterward Mrs. Green set the dustpan beside the window which she had already opened. That was my chance. I seized it. I flew out of the window. And here I am."

Mrs. Ladybug's listeners shook their heads in sympathy.

"You had a narrow escape," they told her." It's a wonder you got away."

"Yes!" said Mrs. Ladybug. "And I'm glad now that that window was open. But for a moment I didn't much care what became of me. To think that anybody should mistake me for a Carpet Bug! Mrs. Green ought to know that the Carpet Bug family are covered with black, white and red scales. Ugh!"

Mrs. Ladybug shuddered. She was smooth and shiny herself. So it wasn't strange that she should have felt insulted.

"Anyhow," she added, "Mrs. Green is the loser. Toward spring I would have kept her house plants free from insects. But now, of course, she'll have to do that herself."

"Well," said the neighbors (or words to this effect), "we're glad to see you again.

And now—tell us!—where do you expect to spend the winter?"

"I'll let you decide that," Mrs. Ladybug replied.

THE END

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- *The Tale of Bobby Bobolink* (c. 1920)
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- *The Tale of Grandma Goose* (c. 1923)

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